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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000481

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SUBJECT: SCHEMING IN BAGHDAD: SUNNI ARAB DESCRIBES PLAN TO
BLOCK JAFARI; ALLAWI LIST WONDERS IF KURDS TRULY IN

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT S. FORD FOR
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Allawi allies told us February 15 that the USG should urge Talabani to join with Sunni Arabs and Allawi to form a larger parliamentary bloc than that of the Shia Islamist List 555. Separately, Sunni Arab Tawafuq Front official Mahmoud al-Mashadani speculated that Sunni and Kurdish parties could join with Allawi's list, SCIRI and Fadhilah to make Fadhilah leader Nadeem al-Jabiri prime minister. Mashadani also maintained that there has been a sea change in the insurgency, which now fears occupation by Iran, not the U.S. END SUMMARY

ALLAWI ALLIES LOOK TO KURDS

¶2. (C) A number of attendees at a February 15 Allawi-list civil society event told Poloffs that the Kurds would side with them in the assembly but had not yet agreed to join them in forming a government. Allawi allies Shaykh Adnan al-Janabi and Dr. Hatem Mukhlis said that the USG should urge "the Kurds" -- meaning Talabani -- to join with the Sunni Arabs and Allawi to form the largest parliamentary bloc. This bloc then would be in the driver's seat for government formation. Shaykh Adnan told Poloff that the Kurds were expressing caution, saying that to join with the Sunni Arabs and Allawi would provoke the Shia Islamists. The key, both Shaykh Adnan and Hatem Mukhlis said, was whether Hakim would be willing to break with Jafari. If so, they said, the PM race would be wide open. (Comment: we await the return of al-Hakim from Najaf where he went February 15 to consult with Ayatollah Sistani. End Comment.)

MASHADANI DESCRIBES AN ALTERNATIVE COALITION

¶3. (C) Mahmud Mashadani, a leader of the Tawafuq Coalition, told Poloff February 15 that his Sunni Arab bloc is considering supporting a new political coalition to counter a Jafari-led government. Under this proposal, Tawafuq would join the Kurds, Allawi and elements of the Shia List 555, including Fadhila and SCIRI, to claim the Prime Ministership for Fadhila leader Nadim al-Jabiri. In addition to these large parties, Mashadani said the new coalition would have the votes of Saleh Mutlak's Dialog Front -- with or without Mutlak himself -- and a handful of the minority parties. Mashadani suggested that the core negotiating group for this coalition should include Mahmud Barzani, Ayad Allawi, Sheykh Khalaf al-Ayan, Adb al-Aziz Hakim, Nadim al-Jabiri, Abd al-Mahdi and Barham Saleh. When asked by poloff whether Jalal Talabani should also be included Mashadani snapped "no, one Iranian at the table is

enough!" (NOTE: It is safe to assume he meant al-Hakim.)

¶4. (C) Mashadani rounded out his government post proposals by suggesting Talabani as president, Khalaf al-Ayan as Vice President, Tariq al-Hashimi as Speaker and Mashadani, himself, as Deputy Prime Minister for Security. Mashadani also suggested that Adnan Dulaymi, as the "elder statesman", would be ideal for the proposed National Security Committee. Mashadani said that Tawaffug is united behind Tariq al-Hashimi as its leader; he is the only Sunni Arab leader who has the strategic vision, education and presence for national leadership. Addressing concerns about the salafist base of the Sunni Tawafuq, Mashadani assured poloff that Iraqi salafists are more flexible than their counterparts in other Arab countries. (Comment: the truth of this assertion is not self-evident. End Comment.)

IRAN, NOT U.S., WORRIES INSURGENTS

¶5. (C) Mashadani said the U.S. had "burned" Allawi as a PM candidate, but that the former PM would be acceptable as a Deputy Prime Minister provided that Tawafuq gets the MOI and the Kurds get MOD. Security remains the most important issue for Sunni Arabs and the MOI must be accepted by the resistance if the latter are to lay down their arms. Mashadani claimed that there has been a sea change on the part of the insurgency. He claimed that insurgents no longer worry about a US occupation, only that of Iran. He claimed that at a recent meeting, insurgent leaders specifically said no to Iran, no to Saddamists, and no to Al-Qaida, but accepted the U.S. presence.

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PROVINCIAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS SOONER, NOT LATER

¶6. (C) Mashadani said provincial elections should be held no later than two months after the government is formed. He confided that there would have to be movement on constitution review or the street would react. However, he said it might be possible to delay constitution review and federalism for a year or more, as he had heard Iran has told Hakim to back off on his proposal for a southern region. Mashadani made a plea for the USG to help provide security for the National Dialogue. They are threatened daily by Al-Quaida and the IG and need armored cars, gun permits, and a secure compound for their party. (Note: Embassy is assisting with these requests. End note.)

COMMENT

¶7. (C) Mashadani's expression of readiness to work across sectarian lines is encouraging; his head is in it, but we are not certain his heart truly is. In particular, we should not rely too heavily on his professed readiness to work with SCIRI and Fadhilah. Indeed, the Sunni Arab Tawafuq largely blames SCIRI and the Badr Corps for much of the violence directed at the Sunni Arabs. END COMMENT

KHALILZAD